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INFO RUCNOSC/ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY COOPERATION IN EUROPE
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 0574
RUEHYE/AMEMBASSY YEREVAN PRIORITY 1144
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0324
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 001194

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DEPT FOR EUR DAS MATTHEW BRYZA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/10/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [AM](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJANI HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST SEEKS CIVIL
SOCIETY ROLE IN N-K

REF: BAKU 1164

Classified By: Acting DCM Joan Polaschik per 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In an August 8 meeting with Poloff, prominent Azerbaijani human rights activist Arzu Abdullayeva said that she found Nagorno-Karabakh leader Arkadi Gukasyan to be open to a civil society dialogue between the Karabakhi and Azerbaijani communities. Abdullayeva led a delegation of regional NGO leaders on a visit to N-K from July 28 to July 31. Abdullayeva asked that U.S. Minsk Group Co-Chair Bryza meet with Azerbaijani civil society leaders in Baku on his next trip to the region in order to hear about the constructive role civil society can play in resolving the conflict. End Summary.

CORE PRINCIPLES ACCEPTABLE TO CIVIL SOCIETY

¶2. (U) Following the release of the Minsk Group core principles for a settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, human rights activist Arzu Abdullayeva led a delegation consisting of Helsinki Citizens Assembly (HCA) representatives from Georgia, Ukraine, and N-K on a three day visit to N-K from July 28 to July 31. Abdullayeva heads the HCA in Baku and is a member of the Karabakh Council, a civil society discussion forum in which several high-profile civil society leaders participate (reftel). Abdullayeva said that the official purpose of her delegation's trip was to monitor the conditions of Azerbaijanis held in prison and to ascertain the status of missing persons from the conflict, a ten-year project that the HCA has spearheaded with the support of the Council of Europe.

¶3. (C) Abdullayeva told Poloff that she and most civil society leaders supported most elements of the framework spelled out by the Minsk Group core principles. Abdullayeva added that the Minsk Group principles reflected much of the framework for a settlement of the conflict that civil society leaders had already accepted at a conflict resolution conference held in early 2006 held under the auspices of (former U.S. diplomat and current president of the International Institute for Sustained Dialogue) Harold Saunders and (Russian political scientist) Vitaly Naumkin of the Dartmouth Conference Nagorno-Karabakh Working Group. (Note: Abdullayeva represents truly independent civil society in Azerbaijan. The pro-governmental Civil Society Forum -- composed of NGOs with close ties to the GOAJ -- recently announced that its members are forbidden from meeting with Armenians. Azerbaijani civil society activists who meet with Armenians often are denounced as traitors.)

GUKASYAN OPEN TO COMPROMISE, SEEKS DIALOGUE

14. (C) Abdullayeva told poloff that her trip provided her the chance to gauge N-K leader Arkadi Gukasyan's openness to the notion of Azerbaijani civil society's engagement in helping to resolve the conflict. Abdullayeva said that Gukasyan appeared surprisingly flexible and even jocular in their meeting in Khankendi, saying at one point that the Karabakhis would accept "almost anything" in return for year-round supplies of Azerbaijani caviar. Abdullayeva said that Gukasyan expressed disappointment at the complete lack of communication between the Karabakhi community and the government and the people of Azerbaijan. She added that Gukasyan repeatedly emphasized that a decade ago there had been more communication, formal and informal, between the two communities and that the isolation had only reinforced anger and mistrust. According to Abdullayeva, Gukasyan said that he recognized "Azerbaijan's rights" regarding the status of Nagorno-Karabakh and was prepared to discuss Azerbaijan's rights. Abdullayeva told Gukasyan that she and others in Azerbaijani civil society were ready to act as bridge-builders between the N-K and Azerbaijani communities. Abdullayeva asked Gukasyan what message he would like to convey to the Azerbaijani people, to which Gukasyan said, "Tell them we love them."

USG URGED TO ENGAGE CIVIL SOCIETY

15. (C) Abdullayeva told Poloff that civil society needed greater political support to play a constructive role in

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opening a dialogue with the Karabakhi and Azerbaijani communities. Abdullayeva asked that Poloff convey her request that EUR DAS Bryza meet with civil society during his next visit to the region and consider supporting its constructive role in opening a dialogue with the Karabakh community.
HYLAND